

Hats off to our Federal Records Centers

This month I would like to focus the National Archives spotlight on NARA's Federal Records Centers (FRCs), which carry out one of the core missions of NARA quietly and efficiently from coast to coast. That mission, of course, is nothing less than preserving and making accessible the records of the Federal Government day in and day out.

Of the 83 billion pages of records in NARA facilities nationwide, only about 10 percent have been officially archived and placed under the legal control of the National Archives. Nonetheless, the remainder is still used by the agencies that created the records. These records are housed in NARA FRC facilities at 17 locations nationwide, including the Washington National Records Center (WNRC) in Suitland, MD, and the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, MO. Simply put, the FRCs are partners in records management with approximately 400 Federal agencies.

In this role, the FRCs provide "back office" support by housing records for which these agencies do not have storage space but still use and continue to control legally. They provide a bridge between the records' active phase at the agency and their ultimate fate: disposal as temporary records at the end of their useful life or accession as permanent records to be preserved at NARA.

Every year, FRC staffers perform some 13,000,000 retrievals and refiles for agencies in the Washington, DC, area; for regional offices; and for individuals who need the records for either personal or professional use. The FRCs dutifully care for and make accessible at a moment's notice a wide range of records vital to the functioning of the Government and to our fellow citizens. A small sampling:

- Tax records that the Internal Revenue Service needs to retrieve to deal with individual cases;
- Copies of Federally assisted mortgages from the Department of Housing and Urban Development;
- Records of Native American tribes, part of the American Indian Records Repository for the Bureau of Indian Affairs; and



- Passport applications by Americans that are retained by the Department of State.

In addition:

- Military files of all those men and women who served in uniform during the 20th century

provide documentation of their service and eligibility for veterans' benefits.

- Personnel files of millions of former Federal employees chronicle the work life of these citizens.

- Records of Federal courts provide a wealth of information—not only from the legal filings and judicial decisions but from documents entered into evidence during proceedings in Federal courts.

In only the sixth year of operation, the Federal Records Centers operate like a business within the Federal Government. The FRC program receives no direct congressional appropriations and funds all of its operations—rent, payroll, and other expenses—with fees it charges Federal agencies using its services. Last year, for the fifth consecutive year, the FRCs earned a profit.

This work is carried out by some 1,200 full- and part-time employees who retrieve, deliver, and refile Federal records for NARA's client agencies. At the same time, the volume of records—now more than 25 million cubic feet of paper—continues to grow. As a result, the need for storage space also continues to grow.

Last year, new records centers in Ellenwood, GA, for the Southeast Region, and Riverside, CA, for the Pacific Region, were opened. We broke ground for another in the Southwest Region in Fort Worth, TX. Underground storage space has been expanded in caves in Lenexa, KS, and an 80,000-cubic-foot cold storage facility was built there to house aerial photographs and similar special media holdings. We are now building special media vaults to store and service electronic records at Suitland and Fort Worth.

The FRCs' staffs have also brought

NARA accolades for a quality that is precious to the agency—customer service. Another small sampling, this time of kudos:

An official of the State Department writes, "Your staff has always been friendly and accommodating, even when outside pressures forced us to be a bit demanding."

From the Agriculture Department: "These days it's not very often that you run across someone who is so willing to go above and beyond his duties."

The Labor Department adds: "Thank goodness for the service availability. I continue to be one of your very satisfied customers."

Omar Herran reports that the Bureau of Prisons has used the FRCs for many years and appreciates their responsiveness to customer needs. He says, "Without doubt, FRC's collaborative efforts with Federal agencies will continue to strengthen its services and program operations."

With customers and clients like that, there's very little to add in conclusion, except to salute NARA's energetic and creative Federal Records Center program and those who staff it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen Weinstein". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

ALLEN WEINSTEIN
Archivist of the United States

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